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General Assembly

Official Records

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

404th Meeting
Wednesday, 15 June 1994, 10 a.m.
Vienna

Chairman: Mr. Hohenfellner . . . . . (Austria)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Other matters *(continued)*

Mr. Mulder (South Africa): Since the South African delegation is speaking for the first time, allow me to express our appreciation to the permanent members of the Committee for permitting us to attend this thirty-seventh session as observers. We would also like to commend you, Sir, for the excellent way in which you preside over the Committee's business.

Many arguments can be advanced in support of South Africa's interest in becoming a permanent member of the Committee. Allow me to mention just a few.

South Africa's unique geographical position offers potential for the expansion of cooperation on satellite-tracking activities. In 1957 the United States Naval Research Laboratory selected South Africa as one of the prime locations for its Minitrack system for tracking Project Vanguard satellites. This led to a considerable infrastructure for the tracking of satellites being established in South Africa. The Satellite Applications Centre and Hartebeeshoek Radio Astronomy Observatory have continued to play an important role in space applications and astronomy. Remote sensing data for the southern African region from METEOSAT, LANDSAT and SPOT satellites are provided.

In addition, several university groups are carrying out active research programmes in space science. These groups operate a variety of equipment for the study of the Earth's upper atmosphere, ionosphere and magnetosphere, as well as the depletion of the ozone layer. They are also active in remote sensing research. This work includes image processing and the development of remote sensing instrumentation.

South Africa's Green Sat, to be launched at the end of 1995, will make available high-resolution images which will be of use in the planning and usage of natural resources for every country in southern Africa.

As the programmes administered by this Committee fall largely into the domain of training and exposure to space applications, South Africa could become a regional or subregional training centre for space science and technology.

With regard to South Africa's current status at the United Nations, allow me to make the following remarks. On 25 May 1994, with the adoption of Security Council resolution 919 (1994), the mandatory arms embargo against South Africa in terms of resolutions 418 (1977), 558 (1984) and 591 (1986) was lifted. This constituted the lifting of the last sanctions against South Africa.

Since November 1974 South Africa has been prevented from taking its rightful place in the General Assembly. However, next Tuesday the General Assembly will resume its session in New York. We believe - and the indications are clear - that South Africa will then take its place in the General Assembly, thus being able to participate constructively in the working activities of the United Nations.

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Mr. Senkevitch (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): In order to implement properly the current scientific, technical and legal strategies relating to the diverse aspects of outer-space activity, to give a comprehensive view of its present and future tasks and to be sure that we do not lose sight of any essential components, we must make a global assessment of our prospects and use it as a basis for developing our present activity.

In the scientific study of prospects in any sphere, including outer-space activities, scientists distinguish three stages of work. The first is system forecasting to ensure the development of the concepts, goals and tasks of the activity and to determine the requirements for the planning of promising new projects. The second is system design, during which competing alternative versions of projects are designed, the optimal project is selected and the key problems involved in its implementation are assessed. The third stage is programme planning. This is the concluding phase of systems analysis, carried out in order to formulate a global programme of work, with a view to calculating the effectiveness of the projects and the technical and economic indicators of the operations and to establishing a time-frame.

In the research process, analysis and synthesis inevitably alternate. The system is gradually broken down into its simpler components. In other words, studying a system means establishing and understanding the forward and feedback connections between components at various levels and thereby gradually eliminating the uncertainty of our knowledge concerning the object in question.

People may, with some justification, raise the objection that our Committee is not a scientific research organization. Under its mandate, however, the Committee is the United Nations body that receives and considers the necessary information on the outer-space activities of Member States.

As is well known, the Committee's tasks include determining fields of endeavour in which it would be desirable to establish international cooperation and to implement international programmes under the general direction of the United Nations, as well as determining activities, some with United Nations support, for the use of outer-space technology for peaceful purposes. The Committee can also determine future organizational measures for ensuring international cooperation within the framework of United Nations programmes.

In the implementation of such activities, it would evidently be desirable and useful to apply the world-wide scientific practice of systems analysis and to consider both expert opinion on the subject and the problems involved in the links between the activities. No matter how unusual this formulation of the situation may seem, it could prove very useful to discuss it and to exchange opinions and information on long-term prospects for outer-space activities - for example, at special thematic conferences or seminars - and to call upon the services of outstanding specialists in systems analysis as applied to cosmonautics. And at some future date we might also take the traditional decision to establish within the framework of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee a scientific coordination working group on systems analysis. Working proposals could be prepared and presented by the next session of the Committee.

Now I should like to speak specifically about our world's outer-space activities at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Forecasting work is being systematically done in Russia, the United States, the European Space Agency, Japan and China and in other countries. There exists a body of normative (quantitative) and research methods of complex analysis that has been confirmed by many years of practice. Long-term forecasts of the prospects for outer-space activities are published every year or two.

I should like to describe briefly to the Committee some of the work done in Russia by specialists of the Central Institute of Space Technology, the Academy of Sciences, the Academy of Cosmonautics, of which I am Vice-President, and other scientific and planning organizations.

Russian scientists are considering three possible ways of developing outer-space activities: the maximalist, the intermediate and the minimalist versions, depending on the level of financing and the time when the implementation project is begun.

Let me briefly mention some of the projects.

First of all, we have the new generation of international systems for communications, television broadcasting, navigation, remote sensing, prospecting for natural resources, ecological monitoring and natural-disaster warnings - systems functioning with the active participation of the United Nations. As we see it, the work would start

between 2005 and 2020, depending on the amount of financing.

Next there is the pilot-plant production of unique materials in outer space, which would begin between 2005 and 2015, with industrial operation between 2020 and 2040.

Removal of space debris from orbit would start between 2010 and 2015 and be fully operational between 2015 and 2030.

For manned bases on the moon, including their use as a preparatory stage for a manned expedition to Mars, the time-frame is between 2015 and 2025.

Manned expeditions to Mars and other planets are expected to begin between 2020 and 2030.

The removal of the radioactive wastes of nuclear power plants to special repositories in outer space would start between 2015 and 2025, handling at least 800 tons a year, an amount too large to be buried under ground on Earth. The system would be fully operational, disposing of more than 1,200 tons per year (the amount currently produced), between 2025 and 2040.

The outer-space utilization of solar energy, with a power of more than 1 megawatt, should be seen between 2010 and 2020.

Lastly, systems for transmitting energy to the Earth, to supply power and illumination to polar areas and cities, would be in operation between 2020 and 2040.

For carrying out the work on these projects, we estimate that in order to set up the necessary groups of spacecraft in near-Earth space, the total carrying capacity for cargoes sent into space, even for the intermediate variant, will increase from our current estimate of between 800 and 1,000 tons per year to between 3,000 and 5,000 tons per year by 2020 and up to 10,000 tons per year by 2030.

Many of these tasks at the beginning of the twenty-first century will require carrier rockets with a maximum payload of 100 tons placed into orbit (rockets of the "Energiya" type); the payload will increase to between 350 and 400 tons by the year 2020 and to between 500 and 600 tons by 2030.

Even if only a part of these predicted operations will be carried out with active United Nations participation, the Committee will find it useful to make arrangements to familiarize itself with the materials of the various countries and to use the organizational forms I have mentioned. No significant factor, no key problem should escape our attention; the Committee and its subcommittees can and must make a maximum effort to contribute to a well-reasoned scientific, technical and juridical solution of these problems. The future of cosmonautics and the welfare of succeeding generations in the next millennium depends on this.

Ms. Roa-Suazo (Nicaragua) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I wish to address the Committee on behalf of the Group of 77, touching briefly on three main points.

The Group of 77 submitted a detailed working paper during the thirty-first session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee on the subject of holding a third UNISPACE conference. The paper, while endorsing the need for holding such a conference, also provided substantial views on various matters, including the agenda, organization, venue and funding. Taking into account the views expressed by many delegations during this session, the Group of 77 believes that the Committee should during the current session recommend the holding of such a conference.

As changes in the international scene and developments in outer space science and technology since 1982 justify convening such a conference, the Committee must at this session identify a set of concrete steps towards holding such a conference.

We believe that the working papers and other documents submitted on this subject, including those by India, Pakistan, the Group of 77 and the secretariat, and the suggestions made by various delegations during the current session form a good basis for members of the Committee to discuss and decide on, at the next session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, a set of detailed objectives and an agenda for such a conference. Hence, the Group of 77 requests that the Chairman take action with a view to achieving consensus at this session on the question of holding the conference.

The Group of 77 supports the Chairman's consultations on the possible enlargement of the Committee, reflecting the principle of equitable geographic distribution among the various regional groups concerned, in accordance with the practice of the United Nations system. It takes note of the formal requests for membership of the Committee submitted to the President of the General

Assembly by a number of members of the Group. In the light of the manifest interest of many countries in joining COPUOS, the Committee should take a final decision on the matter during the present session so that the General Assembly can take action on it during its forty-ninth session.

The Group of 77 also supports the Chairman's consultations on the question of the working methods of COPUOS and its Subcommittees. With respect to this question, particularly regarding the Legal Subcommittee, we believe that the principle of flexibility must be applied. In taking any decision on the matter, COPUOS should be very careful not to underplay the role of the Legal Subcommittee. Rather, we should be concerned with enriching the agenda of that subsidiary body by including items of great interest to many delegations, such as the topic of space debris. The Group of 77 will continue to follow this question with the utmost interest and will participate in the consultations to be held by the Chairman of the Legal Subcommittee at its next session.

Mr. Lee (Republic of Korea): Mr. Chairman, I wish to address specifically the issue of enlargement of the membership of the Committee, with particular attention to your proposal, set out in document A/AC.105/1994/CRP.4. At the outset, my delegation wishes to pay a high tribute to you, Sir, for having produced, after extensive consultations, a very constructive and well balanced proposal on membership of the Committee. Indeed, your wisdom, skilful leadership and untiring efforts have enabled us at last to have a concrete proposal on the basis of which the Committee can finally conclude its years-long discussion on this subject with an agreement on the expansion of its membership. My delegation fully supports this proposal and hopes that all the other members of the Committee can go along with it. My delegation also shares the view expressed by the Chairman of the Group of 77 on this subject in the statement she has just made.

Having said this, I wish to offer some comments on how the Committee can satisfactorily attain the objectives set forth in the Chairman's proposal. First and foremost, my delegation strongly believes that the Committee should take the final decision to enlarge its membership at this session, without any further delay, taking full advantage of the momentum generated among members under the Chairman's leadership. By doing so, the Committee would enable the General Assembly at its upcoming session to take appropriate final action so that the actual enlargement of the Committee's membership would take place during the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly.

My delegation considers that, in order to see this happen, the following two crucial points should be fully taken into account. The first point relates to paragraph 3 of the Chairman's proposal. When the President of the General Assembly appoints additional members in consultation with the regional groups and the Chairman of the Committee, priority should be given as a matter of principle to those countries which are already alternate members of the Committee and to those countries which have already expressed their desire for membership officially through communications to the President of the General Assembly. We believe that the final decision of the Committee on this issue, to be made at this session, will have been made possible mainly on the basis of the desire officially expressed thus far by those States. Therefore, it is only fair to make a distinction between those States which are already on the list of candidates and other States which might express their desire for membership at a later stage. We strongly suggest that this point be duly addressed and that it should be reflected in one way or another in the final version of the Chairman's proposal.

My second point relates to paragraph 4 of the Chairman's proposal. Those countries which receive the endorsement of their regional group and enjoy the consent of the Chairman and the other members of the Committee should be appointed by the President of the General Assembly on an individual basis - in other words, without being linked to the appointment of other candidates which might face difficulties in the process of appointment.

In the light of paragraph 4 of the Chairman's proposed text, which, if adopted, would freeze the issue of membership enlargement for some time to come, we believe that it is only fair and just that those countries which are supported by regional groups and by the Chairman and the other members of the Committee, and which thus meet the requirements for membership, should not be deprived of their right and their opportunity to be appointed as members of the Committee this year at the forthcoming session of the General Assembly. Hence, we also strongly suggest that this second point be duly addressed and reflected in the final version of the Chairman's proposal.

I fully realize the delicate nature of the proposed language carefully and laboriously worked out by the Chairman. However, we are confident that, given the determination of the members of the Committee to find a satisfactory solution to this important issue during the current session, the Committee will be able to find an

appropriate solution by introducing minimal adjustments to the proposed text.

In conclusion, I wish to express my delegation's readiness to cooperate fully with you, Mr. Chairman, and with other interested delegations in making a contribution to the finalization of the Chairman's proposed text.

The Chairman: I wish to recall that the rules of procedure provide that observer delegations are not entitled to submit amendments to any text circulated in this room. I have been very generous in calling upon observer delegations, but I do not accept that observer delegations should offer any amendment to texts not already decided upon by the Committee.

I wish also to recall that, in accordance with the rules of procedure, once we start informal consultations on the report, there is to be no participation by observer delegations.

Mr. Ventura Valero (Mexico) (*interpretation from Spanish*): My delegation is grateful for this opportunity to speak very briefly on the item on the enlargement of our Committee. As members know, the Mexican delegation took an active part in the informal consultations two days ago. Nevertheless, we would like formally to register our position on this agenda item.

The Mexican delegation recognizes the intensive efforts you have made, Mr. Chairman, to arrive at a formula for the enlargement which is satisfactory to all members of the Committee. We have carefully studied your proposal and we agree with it.

We share the view that the enlargement should be limited to no more than eight members, on the basis of the principle of equitable geographical distribution. At the same time, the Mexican delegation, as stated in the informal consultations, interprets the consensus mentioned in paragraph 3 of the Chairman's proposals to mean consensus within each regional group concerning the seat to be assigned to that group in any enlargement. In accordance with the United Nations practice, no regional group can express objections to the decision reached by any other regional group.

The Chairman: We have thus concluded our consideration of agenda item 9 "Other matters".

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.